

‘The earth...shall eat us all’: Exemplary History, Posthumanism, and the legend of King Ferrex in Elizabethan Poetry and Drama.

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The early medieval legend of the ancient British kings Ferrex and Porrex re-emerged in the sixteenth century as a cautionary tale about the disastrous consequences of territorial disunity. The story tells how, around 500 BC, Ferrex and Porrex’s father Gorboduc decides to divide the kingdom of Britain between his sons, some seven generations after his ancestor Leir made a similar error of judgement.¹ Ferrex is to preside over the southern portion, and the younger Porrex over the northern half; in Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s early Elizabethan play, *The Tragedie of Gorboduc* (1565), the aging king uses the river Humber to cut the territory in two. To do so before his death, the theatrical Gorboduc suggests, might allow for a period of apprenticeship, during which Ferrex and Porrex can develop their skills in statecraft. However, the sons clash over the fairness of the land’s division, and Porrex kills Ferrex as a safeguard against his potential envious retaliation. Their mother, Videna, murders Porrex; an angry mob murders Videna; and the kingdom is plunged into a bloody civil war.

John Higgins’s verse complaint of King Forrex, included in his *First Part of The Mirror for Magistrates* (1574) and later rewritten for a new edition in 1587, reflects the 1570 reprinting of Norton and Sackville’s play as *The Tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex* by retelling the story from the perspective of King Gorboduc’s elder son.² Both the play and Higgins’s complaint deploy

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¹ In Geoffrey’s account, the sons inherit on Gorboduc’s death, not before.

² And respells his name, rendering ‘Forrex’ and ‘Porrex’ all but interchangeable. John Higgins, ‘How King Forrex was slayne by his brother King Porrex, about the yeere before Christ. 491’, in *Parts Added to the Mirror for Magistrates* ed. by Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946); Thomas Norton and

this episode from Geoffrey of Monmouth's legendary narrative of ancient British origins, *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136), to critique the politics of their contemporary moment. In the exemplary spirit of humanist history, they encourage readers and audiences to draw parallels between their legendary characters' mistakes and modern-day scenarios, and in doing so they offer their monarch, Elizabeth I, admonitory advice based on past events. Furthermore, both *Gorboduc* and the *Mirror for Magistrates* are texts *about* counsel, and, more specifically, about the failure of counsel (including artistic works) to intercede amid unfolding national disaster.³ Recalcitrant and dogmatic, Gorboduc and his sons refuse to heed the warnings of personal and historical advice alike, and sacrifice the security of the commons to the convictions of self-serving and myopic short-termism.

Norton and Sackville cast the ensuing violent uprising, which lays waste to social infrastructure and the rule of law, as the inevitable consequence of the royal family's failings. However, Higgins departs from the *Mirror for Magistrates'* grounding in Tudor political thought about the commons' resistance to tyranny, from which *Gorboduc* also emerged. The *Mirror* at large had focused on the punishment of rebels and tyrants by human agents of divine justice. But Higgins's tragedy of Forrex posits instead an amoral retributive ecology. His poem suggests that its protagonist's tragic fall is brought about not by humans meting out deserved punishment, but by the nonhuman world, animated to seduce, consume and annihilate. Higgins's emphasis is on the ironic way in which the desire for territorial gain often leads to bodily destruction by that territory itself: why aspire to ownership of land when the land's own repossession of our bodies is inevitable? 'The wretched ground had so bewicht our sight', Forrex laments:

Thomas Sackville, *Gorboduc*, in *Two Tudor Tragedies*, ed. by William Tydeman (London: Penguin, 1992). All further references to these two texts will be given in parentheses after the quotation.

³ See Dermot Cavanagh, *Language and Politics in the Sixteenth-Century History Play* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 43-45.

For why, the earth that once shall eate vs all,
Is th'only cause of many Princes fall.
...wee forget our composition olde,
Both whence wee came, and whereunto wee shall:
Wee scare remember wee bee made of mould,
And how the earth agayn consumeth all.
This great forgetfulnesse breedes Princes thrall. (pp. 241-42)

History – political and natural – might teach us lessons, if only we would remember them. Amid the frenetic abuse of the material world for commercial gain that Forrex's complaint goes on to detail, he suggests that we are liable to sleepwalk into a catastrophe brought about by our insatiable acquisitiveness. However, the complaint's animation of the consuming earth removes any sense that curbing such material greed could save us. Even those 'princes' not in thrall to the earth's bewitching charms will ultimately fall prey to its appetite.

This essay seeks to explore this confluence of exemplary humanist history with considerations of the nonhuman in late sixteenth-century England. It will suggest that Higgins's 1587 version of the story responds to a contemporary 'crisis of exemplarity' which *Gorboduc* both posits and defies.⁴ In addition, it will explore how the legend's narrative of political mismanagement and national division is redirected into eco-ethical territory; that is, how Norton and Sackville's 'succession play' becomes a cautionary tale about the abuse and agency of the earth. The essay draws on currents in ecocritical thought to consider a collection of texts and contexts which are more frequently subjected to the analytical approaches of historicist and New Historicist criticism. But critical understandings of power and the subject, which have

⁴ See François Rigolot, 'The Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59.4 (1998), 557-63.

been central to those modes, nevertheless lie at the intersection of these approaches, in concerns ranging from political authority to cultural intervention; from social hierarchies to the agency of objects. In particular, the Elizabethan reworkings of the Gorboduc legend invite us to consider the power that art might (or might not) possess to move political will.

The *Mirror for Magistrates* was marketed as a sequence of historical warnings to the Elizabethan magistrate class not to fall prey to the ambition and corruption reflected back from the negative examples in its pages. Begun collaboratively in the 1550s by a group of poets, printers, law students and other concerned citizens, the *Mirror* combined its gory accounts of moral comeuppance with topical allegory, interrogations of historiographical truth, and meditations on poetry's capacity to redress political wrongs in an uncertain climate of regime change and censorship.⁵ Less well known than William Baldwin's original series of *Mirror* complaints (1559-78), which spanned the cycle of national conflict between the reigns of Richard II and Richard III, is Higgins's *First Part of the Mirror for Magistrates* (1574), which extended the story back to the mythic foundation of Britain, and included laments in the voices of Forrex and Porrex, Gorboduc's unfortunate sons. Norton and Sackville's play *Gorboduc* might be understood as another kind of scion of the *Mirror* project, retelling British history to moral ends, but this time on stage. Just a year or so before his own visionary 'Induction' and complaint of the Duke of Buckingham were added to the *Mirror* corpus as part of the 1563 edition, Sackville and his Inner Temple contemporary Norton presented their single admonitory legend, *Gorboduc*, first at the Inn's Yuletide entertainment in 1561/62, next in front of Elizabeth I at Whitehall in early 1562, and then in print (1565, 1570).⁶

In 1587, the *Mirror* was printed in its fullest Elizabethan iteration. Compiling Baldwin's original material, later extensions of that corpus, and new British and Roman

⁵ See Harriet Archer and Andrew Hadfield, *A Mirror for Magistrates in Context: Literature, History, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁶ Thomas Sackville's 'Induction' and 'Complaint of Buckingham' were printed as part of the *Mirror for Magistrates*'s 1563 edition.

tragedies, the expansive 1587 edition was a testament to the ongoing popularity of the *de casibus* complaint tradition which the *Mirror* had inherited from Giovanni Boccaccio's collection of legendary tragic falls, *De casibus virorum illustrium* (1373), via John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (1430s), and to the contemporary appetite for exemplary historiography. This text was produced in the same year as the second edition of Raphael Holinshed's monumental *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (first edition 1577), the state-of-the-art compilation of British historiography from the nations' legendary origins to the present day; the *Mirror* ostensibly extracted, for less patient readers, the juicier episodes from Holinshed's sweeping regnal narrative. But Higgins's 1587 Forrex complaint complicates what scholarship has understood about the textbook humanist Higgins, by shedding light on both post-humanist, and posthuman, seams in his writing.⁷ The story of Ferrex/Forrex and Porrex, which had been amplified from a standard exemplary caveat by Norton and Sackville, becomes a different sort of mirror in the political climate of the 1580s, as the collection's moral project is knocked off course.

Humanism and Posthumanism

As Darcy Kern's essay in this special issue makes clear, high humanism's use of historical examples to make political points was central to the literary culture of the early Tudor period, and this practice persisted, thanks to the humanist reformation of grammar school and university curricula, throughout the long sixteenth century. *Gorboduc* was optimally placed to communicate the interests and concerns of its authors to a high-powered audience, although criticism remains divided with respect to the precise nature of Norton and Sackville's message to the queen and the nation's lawmakers. The composition and publication of the text coincided with a series of critical moments in Elizabeth I's reign, from crisis points in her relationship

⁷ See also Rhodri Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 309-11 on *Hamlet* as a 'post-humanist' tragedy.

with Northern nobility and court factions, to peaks of tension in public and conciliar discourse with respect to her marriage and provision, or at least nomination, of an heir. Where some scholars have argued that *Gorboduc* speaks specifically to the threats facing a nation with no clear line of succession, a message whose pertinence and shrill expression only intensified as Elizabeth's reign progressed, others have concluded that the play conveys a more generally applicable message about the enmeshed responsibilities of ruler and ruled.⁸ Its reprinting in 1570 may also respond 'to the rise of the centralizing Tudor nation-state and the decline of the North right after the fratricidal civil feud in 1569', the Northern Rising.⁹ Higgins's 1574 *Forrex* and *Porrex* tragedies likewise focus on the dynastic damage proceeding from ambition and fratricide (p. 178). But Higgins's digressive riff on the seductive appeal of 'earth' in the 1587 version of *Forrex*'s complaint poses a challenge to the aims and techniques of humanist history, because it shows Higgins critiquing the usefulness of legendary examples in rectifying contemporary misconduct.

Literary criticism's recent 'posthuman turn' seeks to decentre an Enlightenment notion of the human subject's primacy, focusing instead on the nonhuman, or 'more-than-human', subject, object, or structure. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes, though, the posthuman cannot be pinned to a specific moment in the history of ideas; instead, it must be 'critically redefined nonlinearly as an "always already" rather than an apex or a temporal rupture'.¹⁰ This

⁸ See for example Kevin Dunn, 'Representing Counsel: *Gorboduc* and the Elizabethan Privy Council', *English Literary Renaissance*, 33.3 (2003), 279-309; Peter C. Herman, "'He said what?!?': Misdeeming *Gorboduc*, or Problematizing Form, Service and Certainty', *Exemplaria*, 13.1 (2001), 285-321; Mike Pincombe, 'Robert Dudley, *Gorboduc*, and "The Masque of Beauty and Desire": A Reconsideration of Evidence for Political Intervention', *Parergon*, 20.1 (2003), 19-44; Kyle Pivetti, *Of Memory and Literary Form: Making the Early Modern English Nation* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015), pp. 29-53; Jacqueline Vanhoutte, 'Community, Authority, and the Motherland in Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 40.2 (2000), 227-39; Greg Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 197-221; Jessica Winston, *Lawyers at Play: Literature, Law and Politics at the Early Modern Inns of Court, 1558-1581* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹ Jaechol Kim, 'The North-South Divide in *Gorboduc*: Fratricide Remembered and Forgotten', *Studies in Philology*, 111.4 (2014), 691-719, at 695.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'In the Middle of the Early Modern', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 13.3 (2013), 128-32, at 130.

understanding lends itself to a developing reinterpretation of Higgins's historiopoetics. Although it pre-dates the Enlightenment, Higgins's poem, too, effects a conscious decentring of the political subject, as it writes the nonhuman back into history. As such, the text can productively be analyzed using the discourse of ecostudies.

Despite the *Mirror*'s vilification of tyrannical leaders, and its central concern with right rule – in other words, responsible stewardship – there have been few attempts to read the text from an ecocritical standpoint. Jim Ellis is alone in exploring the *Mirror*'s symbolic relationship to the landscape within which its histories are situated, extrapolating from the text's depiction of anatomical mutilation a concern for the agricultural and economic dissection of national territory. Ellis suggests that while the *Mirror*

does not often seem concerned with property in the usual sense, it is intensely interested in the properties of the self...The alienated ghosts of the text may bear witness to more than simply their crimes: they are bearing witness to a shift in their society's relation to property and the trauma that such a shift might cause.¹¹

The *Mirror*'s 'compulsive return to the spectacle of the body in pieces' relates to the alienation of property from the self by the rise of capitalism and social change, Ellis suggests; more specifically to the practice of enclosure, and the loss of common-use rights to the land which had been parcelled up for private ownership. This was a loss which, Ellis argues, extended to personal status, authority and identity, as displaced rural subsistence farmers were forced to take up wage labour in urban centres, after their livelihoods were closed off or whole villages uprooted.¹² Further, enclosure was seen as a violation of a natural resource, physically enacting

¹¹ Jim Ellis, 'Embodying Dislocation: *A Mirror for Magistrates* and Property Relations', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53.4 (2000), 1032-1053, at 1033.

¹² Ellis, 'Embodying Dislocation', at 1033.

the psychological violence of late sixteenth-century social upheaval on the earth itself, although it has also been noted that enclosure in England did, for a time, benefit biodiversity, resisting ‘an easy congruence of injustice and ecological catastrophe’.¹³ Ellis’s study focuses exclusively on Baldwin’s early editions of the *Mirror*, in which mutable social status and the tyranny of elites loom large, but where enclosure is not explicitly invoked. The 1587 complaint of Forrex registers enclosure as a new interest, and its treatment of land division promulgates a visceral microcosm of *Gorboduc*’s ‘heavily accumulated cultural traces of anxiety about regional fragmentations’.¹⁴

The poem’s stock critique of earthly ambition runs into an explicit criticism of the ways in which ‘Wee spoyle the ground that all our living lends’ (p. 241). In part, Higgins’s unexpected evocation of contemporary environmental damage caused by commercial activities functions as a reactionary objection to the commodification of common land. He harnesses the discourses of ‘kind’ and ‘state’ to condemn proto-industrial social disruption, taking up *Gorboduc*’s pronouncement that ‘Nature hath her order and her course,| Which, being broken, doth corrupt the state’ (I.2.289-90). Timothy Morton has labelled this kind of approach ‘regular’, or ‘normative ecophilosophy’, which ‘establishes Nature as an object of reverent admiration’.¹⁵ But when Forrex claims that ‘the earth...shall eat us all’ (p. 241), he negates the educative premise of Renaissance humanism’s exemplary history, as well as this normative reverence for an idealized state of Nature. Where historical exemplars would usually function by modelling the consequences of positive or negative behaviour, in the hopes of shaping future conduct for the good, Higgins’s focus dooms all human subjects alike to inevitable decomposition, regardless of their status or actions, while ascribing agency to the earth. This

¹³ Tamara L. Whited, ‘Natural Power through Multiple Lenses’, *Social Science History*, 37.3 (2013), 347-59, at 351-52.

¹⁴ Kim, ‘North-South Divide’, at 698. See also Berg, ‘*Gorboduc* as a Tragic Discovery of “Feudalism”’, at 222, and 213.

¹⁵ Timothy Morton, ‘Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology’, *Qui Parle*, 19.2 (2011), 163-90, at 163-64.

trope, and Higgins's recourse to it, might be seen to resonate with our own ecomaterialist moment, or the trend Morton calls the 'cool nihilism of Non-Nature', which rejects human autonomy and instead foregrounds our helplessness in the face of the more-than-human, such as the environmental catastrophe brought about by climate warming.¹⁶ This tendency has also come in for robust counter-criticism. Srinivas Aravamudan dubs it 'catachronism', a process which 'inexorably begins to reverse the Enlightenment' by denying human agency in favour of the agency of objects.¹⁷ According to Aravamudan, catachronism reinstates 'abandoned conceptions of human finitude from a past rich with apocalyptic nightmares that the Enlightenment had temporarily vanquished'. Does this explain the common ground between twenty first-century posthuman deep ecology and premodernity? Higgins's new complaint likewise exhumes an older animist epistemology with which the political pragmatics of Baldwin's 1559-63 *Mirror for Magistrates* was largely unconcerned, despite its rhetorical disinterment of history's corpses. In doing so it appears to give up on the possibility of positive action for change, surrendering instead to inevitable disaster.

Aligning Higgins's reconfiguration of the *Mirror*'s educative aims with the nihilism of catachronism might make some sense of his rewriting of Forrex's tragedy for the 1587 *Mirror* compilation, while reinforcing Cohen's sense that '[p]ast, present and future are a knot, thick with possibility even while impossible to fully untangle'.¹⁸ The *Mirror*'s 1587 publication coincided with the sentencing of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, to death for her conspiracy to usurp Elizabeth I. As an anthology of examples of rebellion, invasion, deposition and fratricide, it must have struck a chord with a readership looking to the nation's past for guidance, or a vehicle for their unspeakable contemporary fears. But the story of Gorboduc's tyranny and its aftermath, beginning with the assassination of a British monarch by his envious brother in the

¹⁶ Morton, 'Here Comes Everything', at 164.

¹⁷ Srinivas Aravamudan, 'The Catachronism of Climate Change', *diacritics*, 41.3 (2013), 6-30, at 9.

¹⁸ Cohen, 'In the Middle of the Early Modern', at 131.

North, stands out not as a prophylactic case study but as a too-close correlate of present events, despite the attempted intervention of Norton and Sackville's now twenty-year-old play (reprinted pointedly in 1590 alongside John Lydgate's *Serpent of Division*, a fifteenth-century account of the fall of the Roman Republic whose preface noted that if readers 'compare our state with Romes', they would find it 'to be no less in danger and dread').¹⁹ In other words, the new complaint's focus on the nonhuman may be read as a response to the legend's practical failure in shaping political action. To privilege the agency of objects or processes over that of the citizen-subject, as Higgins does between the 1574 and 1587 versions of Forrex's complaint, anticipates Aravamudan's critique of the posthuman turn, as Higgins seems to relinquish the Renaissance poet's civic responsibility in a gesture of despair.

Although much work was devoted in the 1990s to the delineation of a continental European 'crisis of exemplarity', focused on the work of Boccaccio, Rabelais, Montaigne and Cervantes, similar currents in early modern English imaginative literature were largely passed over.²⁰ As I have argued elsewhere, Higgins's 1587 *Mirror* is fraught with the same 'disenchantment with imitative symbols of moral conduct' as this continental movement, which François Rigolot sees as embedded in 'the evident erosion of the humanists' earlier certainties'.²¹ Meanwhile, Dermot Cavanagh has demonstrated the ways in which *Gorboduc*, too, 'invites us to recognize deficient counsel', and 'the difficulties that attend the formulation of political analysis and advice'; Cavanagh suggests that '*Gorboduc* throws contrary

¹⁹ Kim notes that *Gorboduc* also 'reproduces and circulates general anxiety about the Scots and their cultural-political alterities', and sees parallels between Mary Stuart and *Gorboduc*'s Albany, on the basis that Mary 'constantly tried to win over the northern English earls': Kim, 'North-South Divide', at 716-17. John Lydgate, *The Serpent of Division* (London: Edward Alde for John Perrin, 1590), sig. Aiiiv.

²⁰ See for example Philippe Desan (ed.), *Humanism in Crisis: The Decline of the French Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); more recently, Alana Shilling, 'Morgana's Bracelet: Memory Games and the Plight of History in Ariosto's Final Edition of *Orlando Furioso* (1532)', *Italica*, 90.4 (2013), 491-531. Exceptions include Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990); Frank Grady, 'The Lancastrian Gower and the Limits of Exemplarity', *Speculum*, 70.3 (1995), 552-75.

²¹ Rigolot, 'The Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity', at 559. See Harriet Archer, *Unperfect Histories: The Mirror for Magistrates, 1559-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 110-38.

perspectives upon opposing uses of the past, as well as projections of the future, in the practice of counsel'.²² I want to suggest that both texts' articulations of counsel's inadequacy hinge on representations of nature, and the natural world – especially the physical territory of Britain/England as a corollary to monarchical power – such that two posthumanisms intersect around the story's retelling, and Higgins's shift of focus from a politics of envy to the revenge of the contested ground itself. The complaint of Forrex is at once 'posthuman' and 'post-humanist', in that its new emphasis on arbitrary destruction by the earth compromises both human primacy and the governing premise of humanist cultural production. Like the arbitrary death of *Hamlet*'s arch-aphorist Polonius, and his interment 'Not where he eats but where 'a is eaten', Higgins's complaint of Forrex elides post-humanist and posthuman modes, and 'erodes', to borrow Rigolot's suggestive usage, the certainties of humanist advice and education.²³

Irby B. Cauthen's observations about the shared heredity of *Gorboduc* and the *Mirror* speak to a productive entanglement between these bifurcated rejections of authority:

The tragedy of King Gorboduc, a mirror that shows to a beholder what happens to a leaderless land, is the first dramatic embodiment of *The Mirror for Magistrates* tradition. By its use of this tradition, it joins – and rises above – the synthetic *de casibus* story, where the fall of man results from an arbitrary and capricious fate. Here fate collaborates with a man who makes an unwise decision, who abnegates his responsibilities, and who violates the laws of "kind," that primal nature that is the basis for one's living in a beneficent relationship with his fellow-man and with his God. By

²² Dermot Cavanagh, *Language and Politics*, pp. 36-57, at pp. 38-39.

²³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden 3, 2006), 4.3.19. See Lewis, *Vision of Darkness*, p. 32 and p. 277, for comments on Polonius's sententiousness, and pp. 285-86 on his death in connection to post-humanism.

acting wisely and morally, this literary mirror points out, the tragedy that Gorboduc brings upon himself, his family, and his country could have been averted.²⁴

Gorboduc's authors certainly have the *Mirror* in mind.²⁵ Sackville's allusion to the *Mirror*'s subtitle ('Wherein may be seen by example of other, with howe greuous plagues vices are punished') in *Gorboduc*'s final act implies that it is the counsel of the *Mirror for Magistrates* itself that has been willfully ignored by English subjects, when Eubulus laments,

That though so many books, so many rolls
Of ancient time, record what grievous plagues
Light on these rebels aye, and though so oft
Their ears have heard their aged fathers tell
What just reward these traitors still receive
 ...yet can they not beware,
Yet cannot stay their lewd rebellious hands. (V.2.1520-28)

I would suggest that Cauthen mischaracterizes the *Mirror*'s structural dependence on 'an arbitrary and capricious fate', since its tragedies are often predicated on the paradoxically reliable punishment of ambition precisely by means of Fortune's caprice. Yet the violation of kind and abuse of office which Cauthen identifies, central to both the *Mirror*'s internal political ecology and *Gorboduc*'s plot, and particularly 'the play's disillusionment about discourses of "nature" and "kind" as a means of resolving complex ethical dilemmas', are made manifest in

²⁴ Irby B. Cauthen, Jr., 'Introduction', in Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, *Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. by Irby B. Cauthen, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), pp. xi-xxx, p. xix.

²⁵ See also Archer, *Unperfect Histories*, p. 136.

the 1587 complaint in ways that extend and firm up that relationship on explicitly eco-ethical terrain.²⁶

The Unnatural in the Legend of Gorboduc

As Cauthen's comments hint, the concept of unnaturalness is a crucial touchstone for the legend of Gorboduc, such that the myth of ecological equilibrium disrupted by disorderly human interactions inevitably pervades its symbology. Gorboduc's sons are likened repeatedly to Phaeton, 'Who, rashly set in chariot of his sire,| Inflam'd the parched earth with heaven's fire' (II.1.55-56; see also I.2.399-400, II.1.665-68, cf. III.1.808). Norton and Sackville set the geopolitical and bioregional in opposition, when they personify their 'native' island as 'the common mother of us all' despite its recent reallocation as two separate kingdoms (V.2.1615-16). And following this commonplace equation of nurturing women with the natural, Gorboduc's queen, Videna, is the ultimate perversion of nature: a mother who murders her child. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's account she is '*unbalanced*' by the anguish which the death of Ferrex had caused her' (emphasis added), while for William Warner, whose versification of the story as part of his chronicle, *Albion's England*, was printed in 1586, she is 'more then Monster', although Norton and Sackville's queen justifies her actions by calling Porrex, too, 'Ruthless, unkind, monster of Nature's work' (IV.2.1043).²⁷

Elizabeth I, the childless mother of the nation, whose failure to produce or nominate an heir may leave the country open to unnatural division, symbolic matricide, or foreign conquest, is clearly not far from the surface.²⁸ Indeed, Peter Wentworth cites the Gorboduc legend in his

²⁶ James Emmanuel Berg, 'Gorboduc as a Tragic Discovery of "Feudalism"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 40.2 (2000), 199-226, at 214.

²⁷ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 88. In Geoffrey's narrative, Gorboduc's queen is named Judon, closer to John Stow's spelling, Idoine, in *The Chronicles of England from Brute until this Present Year of Christ* (London: Henry Bynnenman for Ralph Newberie, 1580), p. 24, and William Warner's Iden, *Albion's England* (London: George Robinson for Thomas Cadman, 1586), p. 60.

²⁸ See Helen Hackett, 'The rhetoric of (in)fertility: Shifting responses to Elizabeth I's childlessness', in Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (eds), *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England* (Abingdon and New

excoriating litany of national turmoil in his *Pithie Exhortation to her Maiestie for establishing her Successor to the Crowne* (1580s, printed 1598).²⁹ In Higgins's 1574 complaint of Forrex, Ambition, personified as female, is abhorrently indifferent to nature: 'No kinde, or countrey she regards,| No mother...shee' (pp. 168-69), recalling *Gorboduc*'s rebel commons, 'Careless of country' (V.2.1564). The complaint articulates the unnaturalness of envy and ambition, and particularly their disruption of established hierarchies. Whether cause or symptom of shifting social strata, these fatal flaws indicate dissatisfaction with one's ostensibly inalienable estate, but also the underlying problem with 'nature' as a means of social organisation. The manners of Forrex and Porrex's deaths – fratricide and filicide – are explicitly against nature: the sins which bring them to grief are monstrous in their unnaturalness, and their punishments similarly heinous as measured against natural order. The Forrex of 1587, too, pins his plight on aberrant, unnatural forces: the personification Discord – a 'monster vile', her body 'misshapen' (p. 240) – is in part responsible for the enmity between the brothers. 1574's Forrex concludes that humanity is 'worse' than 'brutishe beasts', for at least beasts 'are still contente:| With that they haue' (p. 171); the nonhuman, 'natural' world is framed as a neutral backdrop, here, against which the human characters' perversities are set, although when both Norton and Sackville, and Higgins, draw on the image of the tiger as a beast which acts 'against dame Natures lawe', the problematic of unnatural nature is again invoked (IV.1.1045; p. 178). Warner's *Albion's England* (1586) gives Ferrex and Porrex's mother a speech in which she explicitly takes on the retributive role that meteorological and geological forces fail to play, simultaneously standing in for and renouncing 'nature':

York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 149-71; Karen L. Raber, 'Murderous Mothers and the Family/State Analogy in Classical and Renaissance Drama', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 37.3 (2000), 298-320; Kim, 'North-South Divide', at 708; Jacqueline Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion: Motherland and Masculinity in Tudor Plays, Pamphlets, and Politics* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), chapters 2 and 3.

²⁹ Peter Wentworth, *A pithie exhortation to her Maiestie for establishing her successor to the crowne* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1598), p. 30.

The heauens, me thinks, with thunderbolts should presse his soule to hell,
Or Earth giue passage, that at feast with men he might not dwell:
But I my selfe, euen I my selfe, their slacknesse will supplye,
And mothers name, and Nature both to such a Sonne denye.³⁰

But later that same year, Higgins's Forrex reattributed precisely such agency to the earth, to project a posthuman and post-humanist vision of mankind's end, by muddying the perceived boundaries between the human, and the natural world.

Territory, Mining and Enclosure

The concept of territory politicizes space by delimiting it and investing that delimitation with meaning. The mechanism behind 'territory', then, has this in common with the concept of 'nature', which others the nonhuman by drawing a line around it and bringing it into the domain of the socio-political as an idea. Higgins's Forrex seeks to resist a series of processes which enact this kind of conceptual division and conquest, although his critique also rests on the idea of 'nature' as a category with its own integrity to be violated. Territorial boundaries, and the promised wealth generated within them by an area's human and nonhuman resources, motivate the complaint's tragic outcome, while land itself becomes an agent of disharmony. Forrex and Porrex first mustered their rival forces, Forrex says, 'For bounds'; that is, for territorial expansion, echoed in the bounteous cartographic bequest to Goneril by Shakespeare's King Lear of

...all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains riched,

³⁰ Warner, *Albion's England*, p. 60.

With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads.³¹

Forrex claims that ‘The wretched ground had so bewicht our sight’ that he and Porrex are driven to outdo one another ‘T’inlarge the limetes of our kingdome wide’ (p. 241). This deviates from the narrative relayed in Norton and Sackville’s play, which presents the division of the kingdom – its redefinition as alternative territorial units – as an unnatural upset of the status quo: *Gorboduc*’s Ferrex believes he has been cheated out of his right to the whole territory ‘which by course| Of law and nature should remain to me’ (II.1.3-4), and wishes to win it *back*. By contrast, 1587’s Forrex implies that he wishes to pursue further territorial acquisition. Higgins has his conflict with Porrex predicated on the earth’s suggestive allure, and Forrex switches to a georgic present tense to explore its exploitation whereby enclosure, mining, and even arable farming are presented as bodily assaults on the land:

On th’earth wee greeue the grounde for filthy gayne,
On th’earth wee close the earth t’inlarge our land,
In th’earth wee moyle with honger, care, and payne,
Wee cut, wee dig thence Siluer, Gold, and Sand.
The bowels of the earth wee moyle with might of hand,
With Steele and Iron tearing vnder ground,
And rigging all the earth to make our ioyes abound. (p. 241)

Forrex’s repetition of ‘earth’, with its sinister, emphatic qualities, recalls the medieval lyric, preserved in Harley MS 2253 as follows:

³¹ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (London: Arden 3, 1997), 1.1.63-65.

Erthe toc of erthe erthe wyth woh,
Erthe other erthe to the erthe droh,
Erthe leyde erthe in erthene throh,
Tho heuede erthe of erthe erthe ynoh.³²

As in Higgins's poem, 'The simple device of repeating 'erthe' so many times in such a short space forces a scrutiny of the concepts and associations of the word', including 'soil, world, earth as opposed to heaven, and grave'; 'both mother and devourer'.³³

The zero-sum game of environmental exploitation is captured by the repetition and hint of paradox in 'On th'earth wee close [i.e., enclose] the earth t'inlarge our land'. Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (1567) fleshes out Higgins's vilification of enclosure from the side-lines in similar terms, as part of his characterisation of the fallen Iron Age, when,

...men began to bound
With dowles and diches drawn in length the free and fertile ground,
Which was as common as the Ayre and light of Sunne before.³⁴

For Golding's Ovid, enclosure explicitly comes about in tandem with humanity's diminished splendour after the age of gold, during which land was 'free' and 'common'. The phenomenon had been executed in England sporadically since the medieval period, coming to a head in the notorious Enclosure Acts of 1801. Its practice accelerated in the late sixteenth century, owing

³² The A version, in *Erthe upon Erthe, Early English Texts Series*, ed. by Hilda M. R. Murray (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1911; repr. 1964).

³³ Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 23; 22; 26.

³⁴ Ovid, *The. xv. Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis*, trans. by Arthur Golding (London: William Seres, 1567), f. 3r.

to convergent factors such as the decimation of the rural population by the plague, the deterioration of arable land from overuse, and the booming wool trade, although its evocation in Ovid's poem attests to the appropriation of common land by the elite in ancient Italy too, following the institution of the *Lex Agraria* of 111 BC. By contrast with *Gorboduc*, in which Eubulus describes the land 'torn,| Dismember'd thus, and thus...rent in twain,| Thus wasted and defac'd, spoil'd and destroy'd' (V.2.1747-49) as a *result* of the brothers' conflict, for Forrex, the prospective pillage of the land is their conflict's cause. This orgiastic violence against the earth's body is futile and ironic though, as noted above, because 'the earth that once shall eat vs all,| Is th'only cause of many Princes fall' (p. 241).

Higgins employs two particularly evocative terms to imbue environmental exploitation with grubby corporeality. The repetition of 'moyle' draws attention to its multiple connotations: 'To make oneself wet and muddy; to wallow in mire', deployed both literally and in the figurative sense, meaning 'To toil, work hard, drudge'; 'To root up or extract from underground, to dig up; to burrow or grub'; and tertiary, moralizing senses, including to transform, to defile, to maul or mangle.³⁵ The zoomorphic properties of the term which transforms its agents into pigs, worms or moles, work with the latent animism suggested by the 'defilement' of the ground thoroughly to quash human primacy. Higgins's diction echoes the apocalyptic final monologue of Norton and Sackville's play, cited above, yet *Gorboduc* never connects this despoliation of the land with actual contemporary practices as the 1587 excerpt does, and Eubulus's speech concludes with an optimistic environmental metaphor: 'wrong can never take deep root to last' (V.2.1796). Higgins's new complaint, by contrast, has an unavoidable and unprecedented ecohistorical bent, since it critiques not the destruction of land by war, but normative practices of early modern industry.

³⁵ 'moil', v. *OED Online*, accessed 05/10/16.

The reference to ‘rigging all the earth to make our ioyes abound’ has a similar series of effects: to rig is ‘To search ... thoroughly, esp. with intent to rob; to ransack’; ‘To steal’; ‘To strip (a person) *of* something’; or ‘to behave in an immodest or wanton manner’, ‘to have sexual intercourse with (a woman)’.³⁶ It is also used in a subsequent passage from Golding’s *Metamorphosis*, in which the degenerate Iron Age is described as follows:

Not onely corne and other frutes, for sustnance and for store,
Were now exacted of the Earth: but eft thy gan to digge,
And in the bowels of the ground vnsaciably to rigge.
For Riches coucht and hidden deepe.³⁷

Higgins follows Golding very closely, then, in the language of physical violation used to evoke the enclosure of common land, and mining, which seems to have resonated across late sixteenth-century literary culture. Their discourse of reckless and damaging extraction prefigures the account by Spenser’s personification Mammon of mankind’s despoliation of ‘Vntroubled Nature’ in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), whose allegory of Temperance tells how in ‘later ages’

...gan a cursed hand the quiet wombe
Of his great Grandmother with steele to wound,
And the hid treasures in her sacred tombe,
With Sacriledge to dig

³⁶ ‘rig’, v. *OED Online*, accessed 05/10/16.

³⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, f. 3r.

for ‘Fountaines of gold and siluer’.³⁸ Likewise, Shakespeare’s description in *I Henry IV* (1598) of saltpetre (potassium nitrate), has the mineral ‘digged out of the bowels of the harmless earth’, while King Brutus in another play about British territorial division, *Locrine* (1595), complicates the anatomical metaphor when he describes his son Locrine’s intended wife as ‘A gift more rich than are the wealthy mines| Found in the bowels of *America*’.³⁹

As this final reference in particular suggests, the practice and impact of mining was of topical concern for Higgins’s contemporaries. According to David Cressy’s comprehensive study, saltpetremen ‘were notorious in early modern England for their venality, rapacity and oppressive abuse’ in the pursuit of the valuable constituent of gunpowder, and ‘tested royal authority against individual rights’ as well as ‘the limits of private, public, domestic and even ecclesiastical space’, before, in the later 1600s, the East India Company was able to meet demand from abroad.⁴⁰ Commercial mining had also been gathering momentum in the sixteenth century, as German industrialists imported the technological nous of Georgius Agricola, and his *De re metallica*, published in various editions from 1530. The Company of Miners Royal and the Company of Mineral and Battery Works both received royal charters in 1568, and heralded the commodification of resources previously collected largely informally, from common land, and for subsistence use.⁴¹ The industry was transformed mid-century by ‘the change from surface workings to deep mines’.⁴² Higgins might have witnessed first-hand this new mode of mining in the Mendip Hills, around forty miles from his Somerset parish. It

³⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton et al. (London: Routledge, Longman Annotated English Poets, 2006), II.vii.16-17. See also George F. Butler, ‘Arthur Golding’s Ovid and the Mining of Hell in *Paradise Lost*’, *Notes and Queries*, 51.1 (2004), 27-29.

³⁹ Cited in David Cressy, ‘Saltpetre, State Security and Vexation in Early Modern England’, *Past & Present*, 212 (2011), 73-111, at 75-76. W. S., *The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine*, (London: Thomas Creede, 1595), sig. B2v.

⁴⁰ Cressy, ‘Saltpetre’, at 109, 111.

⁴¹ Bill Frazer, ‘Common Recollections: Resisting Enclosure “By Agreement” in Seventeenth-Century England’, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 3.2 (1999), 75-99, at 80; James W. Scott, ‘Technological and Economic Changes in the Metalliferous Mining and Smelting Industries of Tudor England’, *Albion*, 4.2 (1972), 94-110; Cesare Pastorino, ‘The Mine and the Furnace: Francis Bacon, Thomas Russell, and Early Stuart Mining Culture’, *Early Science and Medicine*, 14.5 (2009), 630-60.

⁴² Scott, ‘Mining and Smelting’, at 95.

also permeated the highest intellectual and courtly circles: Francis Bacon, William Cecil and the Earl of Leicester held shares in the Company of Mineral and Battery Works, while indeed Thomas Sackville owned ironworks and furnaces in Sussex.⁴³ Deep mining was not only a dirty and dangerous business, which visibly scarred a landscape regularly understood in anatomical terms; it also represented a further loss to the commons as royal forests were sold off to support the needs of the burgeoning industry for space and timber.⁴⁴

Higgins thus finds himself at an ecohistorical turning point, a witness to '[t]he agro-ecological transformations of the long sixteenth century [which] signalled not only the rise of a capitalist world economy, but equally the emergence of a capitalist *world-ecology*'.⁴⁵ The mushrooming ecological discourse of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may be understood as springing from the destructive impacts of nascent capitalism; as such it is primarily socially conservative (twentieth-century apprehensions of common ownership notwithstanding). Thomas Bourne's 1578 *Treasure for Travailers*, for example, decries the degenerate modern times, in which

extortion & couetousnes is called good husbandrie:... the one sort ... doo heape vp the goods on the earth vnsaciably, and the other sort ... spende it away most vainely and wantonly, so that the ...riches of the world, are abused on euery side.⁴⁶

But although mining had widely held negative symbolic connotations in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – particularly, Joseph M. Thomas argues, in the early modern American

⁴³ Pastorino, 'The Mine and the Furnace', at 642, 649.

⁴⁴ For a consideration of the epistemological links between anatomy and landscape see Caterina Albano, 'Visible bodies: cartography and anatomy', in Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein (eds), *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 89-106.

⁴⁵ Jason W. Moore, 'The Modern World-System as Environmental History? Ecology and the Rise of Capitalism', *Theory and Society*, 32.3 (2003), 307-77, at 323.

⁴⁶ Thomas Bourne, *The Treasure for Travailers* (London: Thomas Dawson for Thomas Woodcock, 1578), Preface to the Reader, sig. **iir.

imagination, where mining was framed as the covert antithesis of open, godly arable cultivation – the turn of the century also saw the trope deployed with positive reference to intellectual effort.⁴⁷ The biblical injunction in John 5.39, ‘search in the scriptures’, was regularly parsed in sermons and other exegetical treatments as John Prime did in 1583: ‘dig for wisdom, seek for knowledge as after silver and gold’.⁴⁸ Samuel Gardiner claimed in his 1600 *Pearl of Price* that ‘[t]he Scriptures are the harder, and more hidden from vs, because of our slacknes in inquiring after them...Such as digge for silver and gold in the heart of the earth, must not digge lightly vpon the face of the earth, but he must pierce the very veines and bowels of the ground’.⁴⁹ The biblical Greek, ‘ερευνάτε τας γραφας’, alluded specifically, argued Ralph Tyrer in a sermon, to ‘Miners, which doe not pare the ground, but digge deeply...for the gold, silver...or other mettals and minerals which there lurke & lie hid’.⁵⁰ Bacon may have drawn explicitly on his practical dealings with the mining industry when in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) he likened natural philosophy to the process of digging for and then refining raw materials; ‘extracting nature’s secrets from “her” bosom through science and technology’, according to Carolyn Merchant’s seminal ecofeminist reading.⁵¹

Anti-Exemplarity and Ecostudies

How, then, should we frame the relationship between humanist practices – such as commonplacing, with its extraction and utterance of learned nuggets from canonical literature and history – and Higgins and others’ condemnation of environmental exploitation? The

⁴⁷ Joseph M. Thomas, “‘Peculiar Soil’: Mining the Early American Imagination”, *Early American Literature*, 27.3 (1992), 151-69.

⁴⁸ John Prime, *A Fruitefull and Briefe Discourse in Two Bookes: the one of nature, the other of grace* (London: Thomas Vautrollier for George Bishop, 1583), Book 2, p. 187.

⁴⁹ Samuel Gardiner, *A Pearle of Price* (London: V. S. for Thomas Bushell, 1600), Chapter IV, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁰ Ralph Tyrer, *Five Godlie Sermons* (London: John Harrison, 1602), p. 193.

⁵¹ Pastorino, ‘The Mine and the Furnace’, at 632-33; Carolyn Merchant, ‘The Scientific Revolution and *The Death of Nature*’, *Isis*, 97 (2006), 513-33, at 515. See also Merchant, *Autonomous Nature: Problems of Prediction and Control from Ancient Times to the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 81-100.

ostensible point of the *Mirror* is to extract exemplars from the massy chaos of the past and put them to moral work. Moreover, it ventriloquizes the complaints of corpses, laid low by Fortune's wheel then disinterred by historiographical research. Yet here we see Higgins denouncing practical processes – mining and enclosure, agricultural cultivation and even archaeology – which figure the humanist reorganisation of knowledge, at a moment when he also seems to abandon historical exemplarity. As David Lavinsky notes, 'Derived from the Latin verb *eximere*, "to cut out," the word *example* betrays the textual fragmentation and dismemberment specific to exemplary discourse, an abstractive mode that incites moral behavior precisely by ex-citing, calling forth, or cutting out narratives from other bodies of writing'.⁵² The 1587 complaint depicts environmental violence amid a posthuman landscape, in which the retributive justice of the *Mirror*'s historical excerpts gives way to universal dissolution. For Higgins at this point, the study of ancient histories does not constitute a humanizing influence, predicated on a transhistorical self.⁵³ Rather, its fragmentary aesthetics and extractive violence reemphasize contingency, dissolving authorities into their constituent elements; just as, in Richard Halpern's terms, the humanist practice of reading for *copia* in fact 'decomposed' classical texts – and ideologies – 'into harmless, inert atoms'.⁵⁴

Higgins's Forrex, too, considers the 'substance of a man', composed of the four elements, and the separation of these elemental components after death. 'The fire first receaues his heate againe', he suggests; 'The ayre the breath bereaues away by right'; 'The watry and the earthly parts remaine', but only until 'The moistures dry, the bones consume to dust' (p. 242). However, Higgins only gestures towards learned discourses to demonstrate a spurious grasp of pedology (soil science) and geology, before collapsing again into nihilism. This is, I

⁵² David Lavinsky, 'Turned to Fables: Efficacy, Form, and Literary Making in the Pardoner's Tale', *The Chaucer Review*, 50.3/4 (2015), 442-64, at 450.

⁵³ See Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 52.

⁵⁴ Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 47.

think, Katherine Eggert's late Elizabethan 'disknowledge' in action, whereby Eggert suggests that Higgins's contemporaries hedged their distrust of humanism by 'being acquainted with something and being ignorant of it, both at the same time', effecting 'the conscious and deliberate setting aside of one mode of understanding the world – one discipline, one theory – in favour of another'.⁵⁵ Forrex's epistemology flirts with both Boccaccian tragedy and Lucretian natural philosophy, complicating readings of his tale's intellectual framework.

After the body is buried, Higgins continues, 'The wormes with fleshe suffice their greedy lust' (p. 242). This phrase echoes *Gorboduc*'s chorus when they pronounce that 'When greedy lust in royal seat to reign| Hath reft all care of gods and eke of men...Behold how...the brother's hand the brother slays' (IV.2.1320-25). But although Forrex also espouses this message about tyranny and fratricide, his gruesome use of the phrase in 1587 has a wholly different focus. The elision of sex and appetite is for *Gorboduc* a metaphor of political incontinence; for Forrex it refers to literal, apolitical consumption. Compare the theatrical Videna's unfulfilled wish that,

...this most hard and cruel soil...

Sometime had ruth of mine accursed life,

To rend in twain and swallow me therein[.]

So had my bones possessed now in peace

Their happy grave within the closed ground,

And greedy worms had gnawen this pined heart (IV.1.983-89)

⁵⁵ Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England*, p. 3.

Videna's personification of the soil, and its hungry occupants, hinges on a dynamic of judgement and compassion, and the delicate conflation of retributive justice/mercy – Videna's punishment is *not* to have been swallowed by the earth – with ironic opposition: it is precisely the 'rending' of the land 'in twain' by Gorboduc and his sons which will bring about her death. In Higgins's complaint, these moral considerations liquefy.⁵⁶ Forrex returns from his digression with the familiar advice that princes and peers should 'liue content in peace, with their estate:| For mischiefe flowes from discord and debate': this is the core message of the *Mirror for Magistrates* brand. But his startling interpolation, and the repeated insistence that 'wee be made of mould', and the 'earth agayn consumeth all', tips the standard early modern rejoinder to worldly vanity into posthuman territory. His erotics of decomposition, while ultimately still anthropomorphic, harnesses the queer and the grotesque – or, in Graham Harman's terms, the 'weird' – to decentre epistemological norms.⁵⁷

Roughly contemporary with Christopher Marlowe's own tragedy of wayward humanism, Forrex's bewitching earth inspires a lascivious short-sightedness that plays out as a Faustian pact, where lust for land and 'venture' precipitate damnation:

For th'earth forget wee God, (vnfaythfull fooles)
 For grounde forsake wee fayth and all our frends:
 For th'earth wee set our selues to subtile schooles,
 Of grounde lyke swine wee seeke the farthest ends.
 Wee spoyle the grounde that all our liuing lends,

⁵⁶ Tina Mohler's analysis of the discursive significance of 'earth' in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (late 1580s?) sheds light on further ways in which the latent sexuality of burial in the early modern imagination might adumbrate 'the loss of distinctive selves', which also problematizes the *Mirror*'s exemplary model: Mohler, "'What is Thy Body but a Swallowing Grave...?': Desire Underground in *Titus Andronicus*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57.1 (2006), 23-44, at 38; see also 28-29.

⁵⁷ Graham Harman, 'The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism', *New Literary History*, 43.2 (2012), 183-203, at 184 and 188; cf. Rudd, *Greenery*, p. 44.

Of grounde to winne a plat a while to dwell

Wee venter liues, and send our soules to hell. (p. 241)

However, Marlowe's Faustus only aspires to the elemental decomposition which Forrex's worldview ultimately mandates. Faustus despairs,

All beasts are happy, for, when they die,

Their souls are soon dissolved in elements...

O soul, be changed into little waterdrops,

And fall into the ocean.⁵⁸

He longs for, but cannot believe in, the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman matter – 'Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me...Earth, gape!... draw up Faustus like a foggy mist' – whereas Forrex's complaint more nearly approaches, through the seductive 'fadeing blisse' and omnivorous appetites of 'ground', an occlusion of the Christian humanist soul when 'we turne to rot' (p. 242).⁵⁹

Sharon O'Dair recently contended that it is Enlightenment values, not fatalistic posthuman despair, which must be mobilized against the catastrophe initiated by anthropogenic climate warming. Renewed emphasis placed by eco-materialist critics on the agency of objects and the nonhuman world will not help to repair that damage we have caused: in short, for O'Dair, it is 'only humans, not humus', who can effect remedial change.⁶⁰ The criticisms

⁵⁸ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus: A- and B- texts (1604, 1616)*, ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, Revels Plays Series, 1993), A-text, V.ii.110-19. Steve Mentz's *Shipwreck Modernity* is pertinent here, although Mentz does not cite Marlowe: see *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550-1719* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

⁵⁹ Marlowe, *Faustus*, V.ii.84-92.

⁶⁰ Sharon O'Dair, 'Afterword', in Hillary Eklund (ed.), *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2017), pp. 195-202.

levelled at the perceived hopeless passivity of posthuman thought by O'Dair and Aravamudan chime with Higgins's 1587 complaint of Forrex, which turns away from *Gorboduc*'s interrogation of tyranny and counsel, and the *Mirror*'s broader framework of resistance theory and retributive justice, to question the efficacy of political intervention by exploding the work's exemplary premise. As Emily Shortslef and Bryan Lowrance note, contemporary ecocriticism, broadly speaking, 'puts pressure on the central term of political criticism – the human subject – and its effective separation of the sphere of human action from the world of nature and the nonhuman'.⁶¹ The tension between the two modes of ecological awareness showcased in the 1587 complaint – the anthropomorphism of a beleaguered natural world irresponsibly handled, and the vibrant animism of nonhuman agents – demonstrate how the posthuman turn might challenge more traditional discourses of environmental ethics, while Higgins's own posthuman turn could be read as part of a wholesale disavowal of the *Mirror*'s political function.⁶² But political and eco-critical approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive, and Higgins's interpolations do not side-line, but rather point up, the political concerns of his day. Higgins's 1587 complaint of Forrex works on one level to decry the misuse of power using contemporary environmental examples to illustrate destructive human agency, providing food for thought for the historicist branch of twenty first-century early modern ecostudies.⁶³ But the status of the political subject is also at issue for Forrex's tragedy. By integrating the physical body into a mycelial network of nonhuman consumption and decomposition, the complaint reworks *Gorboduc*'s concerns about the deafness of the monarch to sound counsel, and reflects on the concomitant inadequacy of humanist historiography's educative premise. Far from negating

⁶¹ Emily Shortslef and Bryan Lowrance, 'Introduction: A Special Issue on Commons and Collectivities: Renaissance Political Ecologies', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 13.3 (2013), 1-6, at 2.

⁶² Cf. Paul Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 26-27.

⁶³ Gwilym Jones's recent state-of-the-field review of early modern ecocriticism emphasises the conflict between historicism and activist-presentism: Jones, 'Environmental Renaissance Studies', *Literature Compass*, 14.10 (2017), 1-15.

subjectivity, Forrex's complaint begins to assert, with Graham Harman and Timothy Morton's account of dark ecology, 'that the privilege or curse of (human) subjectivity is a feature of everything'.⁶⁴ As such, humanist exemplary education can be no match for the text which itself 'runs deeper than any coherent meaning, and outruns the intentions of author and reader alike'.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Morton, 'Here Comes Everything', at 176. See also Timothy Morton, 'An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry', *New Literary History*, 43.2 (2012), 205-24.

⁶⁵ Harman, 'The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer', at 200.